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Robert Munsch
 Speaks to children



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Will task force listen to homeless

Imagine what it might mean to be homeless. Minus 20 and night is falling, you're looking for a place to rest but you're frightened for your safety. Where would you go? What are your alternatives? Who are you and why are you here on the street?

These are some of the questions that were addressed during a public forum put on by the Edmonton task force on homelessness on Friday, April 9th. The task force was struck in November, 1998, and aims to recommend ways commu-
nity, private, and public sectors can coordinate resources for homeless Edmontonians.

Presentations were made by individuals whose work or personal experiences have to do with the lack of safe, secure, affordable shelter in Edmonton. Throughout the day, the task force heard how organisations and individuals are trying to make a differ-
ence. They heard first-hand what it is like to live on the street or to live with the con-
stant threat of eviction. Time and again, all of those present were reminded that there is a real and urgent need to expand and increase services.

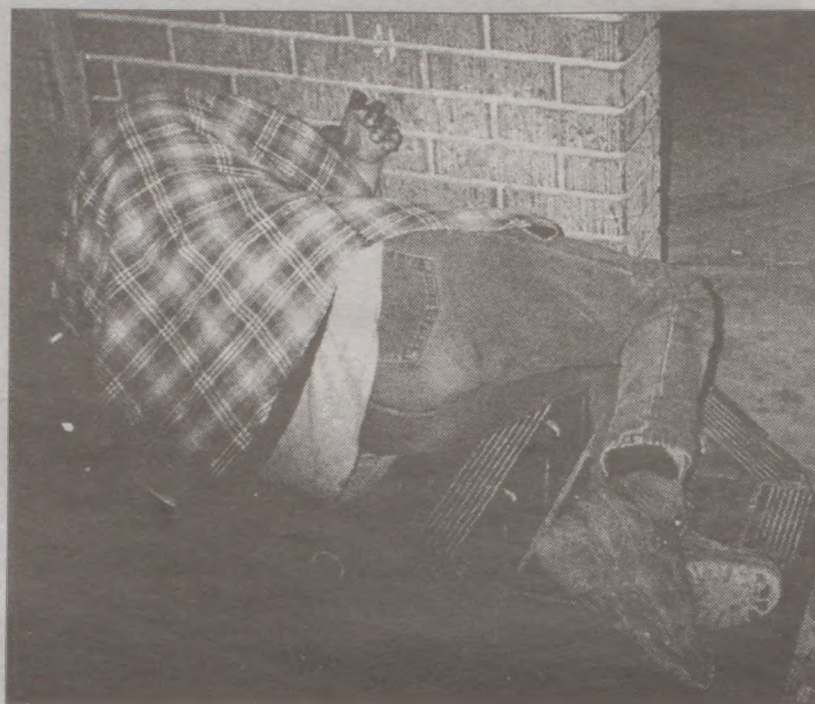
Although it would seem that Edmonton has numerous support services, people are being turned away. According to Christopher Smith, director of the Edmonton Community Foundation, Calgary and Toronto task forces have discovered that home-
less people are not limited to mental health, addictions and transient populations. In
Edmonton, a lack of affordable housing for people in a lower income bracket, persis-
tent poverty, and inadequate support services are some of the reasons for the rise in the
homeless population. People are staying longer in the shelter system and there is a
backlog.

Betty Farrell of Edmonton Inner City Housing pointed out that if, for example,
rent were set for 30% of income, the average inner city resident would be paying \$182
per month.

When monthly income doesn't cover rent, some people are forced to dip into their
food budget - which doesn't leave much for things such as sports activities for children
said Frank Manzara, Chair of Quality of Life.

Recurring recommendations included the need to revise damage deposit policies,
the need to address long-term housing needs, and problems for renters with poor or
no references and low income. Many people urged for increased partnership from all
levels of government and increased community services.

It appears that the challenge for the task force is to come up with viable solutions
and recommendations that heed the voices from the street. The Homeless Task Force is
made up of ten representatives from front-line service agencies, City of Edmonton



Community Services, Alberta Family and Social Services, Alberta Municipal Affairs, the
Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation and private industry. It is being co-chaired
by Edmonton MLA Gene Zwozdesky and City Councilor Jim Taylor. The task force has
identified three short-term and two long-term objectives.

In the short-term, the task force will attempt to describe and identify the size of
the homeless population. They will seek root causes of homelessness and identify the
scope of immediate needs. Secondly, the task force will assess Edmonton's ability to
provide support through existing shelters, social housing, and other available accom-
modations. At last count, Edmonton had 496 shelter spaces which includes 56 urgent
new spots that were given short-term funding this past winter. Finally, the task force is
responsible for recommending funding and immediate needs solutions.

In the long-term, the task force will suggest a way to count and keep track of the
homeless population of Edmonton every two years. As well, it will recommend ways to
meet long-term needs.

Now that the task force has completed public consultation, it expects to submit a
report to ministers in May. The report should have some useful recommendations. For
some, however, the over-riding concern is the end result. All this talk. Again. (As we
know, this problem is not new.) Will there be enough political will for follow-up?

The task that lies ahead is a terribly important one. Stable housing means more
than just shelter. Farrell and Deanna Shorten (Poverty in Action) both pointed out that
housing can stabilise the family as well as physical and mental health. When people
are not constantly moving or aren't being separated from friends, family, and support
services, then peoples' lives have the chance to improve. ♦

Story by Nana Hashimoto

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Robert Munsch

Canada's best-loved story-teller

INTERVIEW BY KEITH WILEY



A chance to talk with Robert Munsch: the author of so many beloved children's books, certainly some of the favourite stories I'd read over and over to my kids. I was thrilled. But somehow I started off awkwardly, "you must be one of the best-selling authors in Canada," I said, and on the other end of the phone I heard a modest hesitation, "I think I am the best-selling author in Canada." Indeed he is, Robert Munsch's wonderful books have sold over 20 million copies in North America! "Mud Puddle", "A Promise is a Promise", "The Paper Bag Princess", "Pigs", "50 Below Zero": Robert Munsch's stories for children have become classics on the bookshelves of every family home in the country. Children love the stories. Parents love the stories. Why do they work so well? Bob Munsch says it's because they are "acid-tested" on real audiences. He started this publishing phenomenon as a daycare story-teller and he always tells his stories to children long before they make it to print.

"I'm always in a position of having groups of three year olds in front of me and they are a real acid bath for stories... what can I do to keep kids interested from age two to eleven. Kids are so transparent, they have a switch, yes or no. Yes, it's good and you can tell right away. In fact you can tell if they like the last ten words or not. Everything has to work, it's like a poem, to hold a child's attention the story has to work all the time," he says.

"I see a kid with earrings in the audience and make up a story about it. Every now and then I make one up that sticks and keep telling it, and those are the ones that make it into a book."

And Bob Munsch gets to tell stories to children a lot. He's always travelling to meet children and new audiences. "The more and stranger places I can drag stories through the better they get," he says. Recently, he said, "I was in Sydney, I was telling stories in Nova Scotia. Peter White of the Edmonton Symphony scripted some of my stories with music. One piece was an old sea chanty and it made me think about a story I tell about a scallop fisherman. I changed around the ending as I told it. Most of my work with stories is oral, in front of the kids, or writing back and forth with children in letters."

Poetry and repetition make Munsch tales very catchy, as in the classic "Mortimer", when after the third time round in the story, every child listening catches on to the refrain... "M o r r r r t i m m m m e r r r r... BE QUIET!!!!"

Munsch says he wrote poems, funny poems, silly poems all during his school years, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. "Nobody thought that was very important." He studied for seven years to be a Jesuit priest and finally gave that up. He had a job part-time in an orphanage, decided he liked working with children and ended up working in daycare. "I found I could tell stories... I told stories at nap time and the kids were quiet. I was in great

demand to tell stories all the time, and they would end up asking for what they liked. Ten years later he was telling stories at the Laboratory Preschool at the University of Guelph. I sent some off and became a writer. It was not what you would call a planned career," he says.

"When I went with Annick Press we did Mud Puddle in hard cover," he says. A new press with only two books published at that point, Annick was willing to experiment. "When the hard cover didn't sell well, we thought, 'that was dumb, let's put them all out in paperback'... then let's put them out in mini paperback, so even kids can buy them. Their idea was to make things more cheap."

Munsch's books, as a result, have gone backwards, first published in the little mini-form, then as paperbacks, and finally after their huge success and demand, in hardcover library editions. Robert Munsch's genius is getting to a child's perspective. "The story about the snowsuit isn't real, but it makes you feel the way it felt when it really happened, for both the child and for the adult. The fiction is in a sense more real than fact, emotionally, because that's the way you really felt.... You can do a lot of things in kids books, they are read by kids and adults. "The Paper Bag Princess" means different things to a two-year-old, a ten-year-old and an adult."

The child's perspective is not the norm in modern life. Munsch says he has "a very heavy sense" that children are pushed to the margins of our society. "Kids are segregated into big things we call schools... and kept apart from society. The people who take care of kids, daycare workers are marginalized." Munsch comes from a large family of nine children. "I have three brothers who are lawyers, there's a metallurgist, an industrial engineer, and me the daycare worker. If you're in a group of adults... often if you start talking about kids, it's a real turn off. People don't want to hear about kids."

But Munsch, says, it isn't like this everywhere. "I lived once in New York City, in a Puerto Rican neighbourhood. Families went everywhere as units, you went to any social occasion and the kids were there, all the adults took care of all the kids. There wasn't this problem of going out and 'what am I going to do with my kid?'"

Perhaps that's what's led Munsch in his recent story-telling directions, about children of different cultures. "A Promise is a Promise" for example, was written by Bob and an Inuit girl and tells her story. His newest book, "Ribbon Rescue" was inspired by a boy Munsch met who wore an outfit that had ribbons from the collar all the way down to the floor. It was a Mohawk boy from the Kahnawake Reserve. "Kids aren't interested in lectures. It wasn't 'hey this is a story about a Native American'. It was just a story about this kid with a fancy dress."

"And there's so much that doesn't get in to the this story. That kid got out of Kahnawake (during the police confrontation a few years ago) in the convey that got stoned by people out on the south side of the river, but of course that's not in the book."

Munsch's stories build bridges between people, breaking down isolations. "People say it's a small world because, say, they met their history prof in Trafalgar Square. Well, there's more chance of that, than meeting him on some Indian reservation in Alberta. It's like a layer cake and the layers are small. Within layers it's a small world, people keep meeting the same people. But different layers don't know about each other.... people who eat well don't know about those who don't. Most Canadians have never been north, most rich Canadians have never lived with a poor Canadian and vice versa."

"It's a big world. Things are really different out there. But most people don't know that."

But Robert Munsch touches deep with people, with things they do know. His most popular book "Love you Forever" ("...like you for always, as long as you're living my baby you'll be." Who can forget it?) was recently on the top of the New York Times Bestsellers List for Kids. As he says: "we're all in the middle of something, and none of us think about it, and that's what the book is about. It's nothing nobody didn't know before, you just don't think about it." ♦

Bill 20 denounces great leaders

by Maydell

The Alberta government is trying to ram Bill 20 through the Legislature. This is an amendment to the Schools Act. A section of this Bill would prohibit the teaching in schools of anything which advocates the violent overthrow of the government or anything resembling civil disobedience.



There goes the American Revolution, the French Revolution, the Puritan revolution, the Russian revolution, the Cuban revolution, the American Civil Rights movement, the Women's movement, the Riel rebellion, the Quiet revolution, Biblical revolts, Irish uprisings and Spartacus. Oops! There goes the American transcendental movement, most of the English Romantics and all the anti-war poets. Snip! There goes Shakespear's Julius Caesar, McBeth and Richard III.

Better throw out Charles Dickens and John Steinbeck just in case. There goes a good chunk of Russian literature and much of French literature. When I was in high school in Saskatchewan, under a socialist government, I studied Victor Hugo in French. This undoubtedly made me what I am today. A radical egghead and I value myself tremendously.

What about the 1812 overture and the Warsaw Concerto? What about Shostokovich? Don't forget the plays of Peter Weiss, Jerry Grotowski, Vsalv Havel and Berthold Brecht. Down with murals of Diegg Rivera! Out with Pacasso's Guernica! Adolescents interested in Helegian dialectic will have to study it underground. No Lutherans allowed! Students won't have to hear trash about Robert Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Mahatma Ghandi or Les Welensa.

There were no dissidents involved in the collapse of the Soviet Union. Everyone consented and it just went away. Ditto for the war in Vietnam. We should try that in Alberta. Who is going to enforce this law? The police? No wonder there are no Albertans on the moon.

I am reminded of the apartheid government in South Africa, which banned Black Beauty until they discovered it was about a horse. To be absolutely safe, I think students in Alberta should be restricted to the study of the rantings of Conrad Black and the transcripts of the Legislative Assembly. I don't think the Alberta government is in imminent danger of being overthrown by school children. It's their parents I'd worry about.

I have a modest proposal. Let's build a big bonfire and burn all of this objectionable stuff. We could erect stakes and burn a few eggheads (...non conformists) as a lesson. ♦

Wheel chair dealing...

by Maydell

Some time ago, Dr. Lyle Oberg announced to a breathless and waiting public that persons with disabilities were selling their drugs on the street. I thought this was a groovy idea, so I hustled down to the inner city with my 30 caps of Sinequan and 30 hits of Chlorpromazine.

I discovered that most people said they weren't depressed and didn't want the Sinequan. Others said the Chlorpromazine made their jaws move sideways and didn't want that either. There was a big demand for Valium and Ativan. Anyone with those drugs should be selling them because they are addictive. Most doctors won't prescribe them.

I knew a guy who tried to get high on Lithium, but his kidneys failed and he died. Anyone selling their Lithium should include a warning. I know a guy who sold some tranquilizers for \$5. His clients turned him in. If any of you schizophrenics plan to sell your Clozapine, you better make sure to set up regular blood tests.

Insulin is also a fun drug. It's popular with bikers. They put themselves into comas.

I think selling our drugs on the street is a nifty way of getting back to work. We could set up shops, take over vacant supermarkets, get on the internet. We could courier the drugs around on DATS, although it is a notoriously slow and unreliable form of transportation. Selling our drugs could be our Community Economic Development project. God knows, money for CED projects isn't going to come from anywhere else. I'm sure our doctors would cooperate by providing us with massive amounts of drugs for a few kick backs. None of our pharmacists would even notice.

Shortly after Dr. Oberg's allegations, a local news program, caring for ratings now, obligingly showed some poor schmuck in a wheelchair being hauled off in a paddy wagon for allegedly selling his medication. Gee... he sure looked guilty to me.

To further his drug busting, Dr. Oberg has restricted the availability of incontinence supplies. Depends are now sold on the black market so if you see a guy in a trench coat with big, bulky packages under it; it's probably bootlegged disposable diapers.

It's nice to know there is a vigilante in charge. Otherwise, we'd all be going to hell in a hand basket. ♦

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Talking Back

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Quality of Life Commission Report.

"People have ceased to be the top priority in social policy," said an opening statement in a report published by the Quality of Life Commission in March of 1996.

The report was called "Listen to Me!" It recorded the commission's findings after listening to 21 Edmonton Groups talk about their experiences, groups such as low income families, immigrants, seniors, teenage mothers, small business people, youth, street people and aboriginal parents.

The report made 40 recommendations about reversing the trends toward hardship, hopelessness and despair among Albertans. In the last three years, the Quality of Life Commission has promoted those recommendations to cabinet ministers, opposition members, bureaucrats, community leaders, church leaders and business people. We have caught the ears of Rotarians, bishops, politicians, journalists, activists and academics. We have repeated our message over and over. Governments need to know how their policies affect people, especially those who live in poverty, and implement more informed and generous policies.

Have we seen any results? Yes and No. Poverty in Edmonton is increasing.

But AISH recipients will get a slightly better package. Social services claws back the increase from the Child Tax Benefit. But low-income families get free health care for their children. Homelessness is a major hardship in Alberta cities, but there is a wider public awareness of the problem. The Quality of Life Commission isn't solely responsible for these small improvements, but we are part of a network of citizens who use our influence to draw attention to our neighbour's difficulties.

We ourselves have become better informed. The commission is known in political circles. We get invitations to present briefs at hearings on social policy. We show up at rallies. We get interviewed by the media. We are proud to list Senator Douglas Roche and University Chancellor Lois Hole among our members and proud of our connections with people living in poverty.

We facilitate conversations between people with political power and those without it. We believe people of different experience should talk together. We believe in the strength of human spirit. We intend to keep listening to those who are suffering hardship. We will keep lobbying those who can do something about it. ♦ **Faith Brace**

Not third world poverty- more disgraceful

If the parents are poor, the children are poor. Poor children often grow up to produce more poor children. It's called the poverty cycle. Kathleen Rutledge was a secretary at Eastglen School for 23 years. She said after a while she saw the same names coming back onto the school register. The students who had been children on welfare were still on welfare, and raising their children on welfare.

For them, poverty means unstable housing, and a less than adequate diet. Often parents resort to buying what will last the longest or is the cheapest instead of the most nutritious. It's drink mix instead of juice. Of the parents who filled out the Edmonton Food Bank survey, nearly 17% said their children had missed meals because there was no food in the house. Some children missed a meal a day. This was even though almost half of the parents had skipped meals themselves so their children could eat. When there is limited income, housing and utilities have to come first. Then everything else. Food money is often the only money not already allocated to a fixed expense. With housing taking up to 60% of the total (insufficient) income, there's not much left. Any small emergency can devour the food allowance.

Poor children often grow up in homes where the social worker has taken over the parenting role treating children and parents alike as dependents. It appears there is funding to help poor children through programs but are we overlooking that the real need is for parents to be able to provide the learning stimuli at home? Who benefits most from programs? Those who are paid to run the program, and have the feel good benefit, or the children being programmed? A follow up of children who took Head Start, a pre-kindergarten program, indicates that they initially did better in school, but the effect wore off after a few years because the home environment was not changed.

There are activities the children can't participate in. Every poor child has heard, "We can't afford it." After a while they stop asking. Expectations are lowered.

Poverty dampens the relationship between parents and children. Parents are more likely to be under stress and to be depressed.

As one father put it, "I'm treated as though I lost my mind when I lost my job." Our government's lack of concern for the welfare of children in poverty was clearly revealed as early as January of 1993, when the first cut back to social assistance was the elimination of the children's recreational allowance. This was money available for new bicycles or skates, dance lessons or a trip to summer camp. The reason given was that many parents were not taking advantage of the money. How could they when most never knew it was available? After all, as Bob Scott, spokesperson for the Department of Social Services said, it is not their policy to give people anything unless they ask for it.

Last fall the federal child tax benefits were increased for children living in poverty, supposedly to help parents to better provide for their children. Immediately, the social services sent letters informing clients that their checks would have deductions equal to the extra money being given. Once again the children, the most vulnerable and poorest of the poor, were deprived of any benefit from the increase.

I hear, on a regular basis, reminders that this is not a third world country and that there are children, we see them on TV, who are living in Third World countries. There are also refugee children who have lost their homes. As Sharon Starr from the housing directory of the Boyle Street Co-op said, "We cannot compare Third World Poverty with what we have here." It's not the same thing. There it is a tragedy. Here it is a disgrace.

As a volunteer inner city street minister, I have seen children in poor homes right here in Edmonton who would make equally pathetic TV ads. I have taken hampers to homes where the only food in the fridge is a bottle of water. There are partially furnished homes, with children sleeping on foam mattresses on the floor, (that's too be expected since the social services decided in September, 1993, that people on assistance no longer needed furniture and cut back on the money for housewares and furnishing.) No, poverty for Alberta children is not Third World poverty. It is not an act of God like a hurricane, or a famine causing drought; it is preventable. It exists because of unfairness and inequality. For Alberta children living in poverty it means living in a so-called land of plenty and knowing that for some intangible reason you cannot have what other children have. This leads to lowered expectations, a loss of self worth, and a continuation of the cycle of poverty.

Linda Dumont

Editorial OPINION

Our Voice the spare change magazine

Enough of the excuses!!

Alright. Again we have heard that child poverty in Edmonton is rising and that tens of thousands of Alberta children are living without enough to eat. The Edmonton Social Planning Council recently reported that 48,000 Edmonton children are living with hunger or are at risk of hunger. A committee in Calgary called Feed Calgary's Children revealed similar findings in that city. There, 45,000 children are at risk of going hungry and many already are. However, this is not the first time we've heard these types of terrible stories.

With the most recent findings about child poverty in our province, we got the usual reaction from our elected leaders. I, for one, am sick and tired of Klein and his cabinet of uncompassionate money men purposely avoiding issues that they fully realise are hurting many good people in this province. Klein is not an ignorant man and people who work with those who live in poverty and especially those who are poor have told him about the harsh realities of being extremely poor. These are not fables. These are truths that are as hard and real as the ground we walk upon. Klein went on record in response to the recent reports and said that "if this is the case it must be because parents are neglecting their children." You have to be kidding me!



It's time for Klein to be challenged. He cannot get away with saying such things. He is the one who has chosen to neglect children and poor and disadvantaged Albertans. He and his government have been the purveyors of most of the misery people in Alberta have had to endure. They have cut social spending to the bone and reinvested little as they brag of surpluses. They have constantly threatened our public health-care system. They have decided that if an Albertan becomes down on their luck that it's not the governments problem.

The easiest thing to do, is to blame the people with the problems for their problems. That will absolve us from dealing with the issue. Klein is the king of this method of problem solving, but this has to change. He and his government have a responsibility to at least acknowledge problems that unquestionably exist in our communities and attempt to find solutions. That is his job and our tax money is paying him to do that job.

Children in Alberta have no more time to listen to his petty avoidances of terrible realities that are sending them to bed hungry every night. They need food, education

and happiness. Their parents need decent paying jobs and security to raise their families and all Albertans deserve a decent standard of living. It's time for our Premier to start spending more energy finding solutions to problems instead of finding excuses.

Wayne and Keith.

April 18, 1999 was undoubtedly one of the saddest days of my life. I, along with millions of other Canadians and hockey fans watched Wayne Gretzky play his last game in the N.H.L. This deserves mention in this magazine which tries not to talk much about millionaire athletes. Wayne Gretzky is more than a millionaire athlete. He is a hero to many people including me. He is our Canadian superstar. I remember laying in bed as a kid when I was supposed to be sleeping, listening to Rod Phillips on the radio screaming out every amazing stroke of Gretzky brilliance. I cried when they won the cups, I cried when they traded him, I cried when I saw him sitting on the bench alone after losing the Olympic Gold and I cried when he skated around the ice for the last time in late April. But even though he's always making me cry, I still would like to thank him for being so darn great and making so many people happy. Maybe one day we'll be able to feature him on the cover of **Our Voice**.

On a final note, **Our Voice** is officially without the designservices of Keith Wiley. I would like to take a moment to thank Keith for all his work and for the support he gave me. I have moments when I feel like I can't make this thing happen without him, but I'm sure I'll be fine. So thank you Keith. You are truly a wonderful person and I miss you.

Welcome to Dave Luxton, who will be taking over the graphic design of the magazine. We're lucky to have him.

Michael Walters

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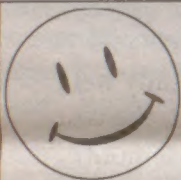
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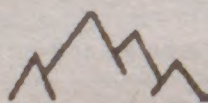
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IN POOR HEALTH

by H. Slade

It has been hard to ignore the crisis in health care in our province. Not surprisingly, a lot of finger pointing has occurred with blame being bounced from governments both past and present. A lot of attention has been on the general effects of reduced medical

care, but let us not forget the real people involved.

First there is James, a 42 year old Metis male. He and his brothers were raised by a hard working single mom. He remembers being poor and hungry much of the time. At 12 he began to experiment with alcohol and soon found himself in trouble with the law. He admits to being an alcoholic, but so far has been unable to kick the habit. He has spent most of his adult life living on the streets. He sleeps in the river valley and eats whenever he can get a meal. Despite being a relatively young man, he has had 4 heart attacks and is not expected to live through another. Some of his health problems include: malnutrition, high blood pressure, severe heart muscle damage, addictions to cigarettes, alcohol and various forms of street drugs. He is resistant to medical treatment even for what most of us would consider emergencies. He considers hospitals and doctors to be similar to jail and guards. He seems to suffer from paranoia, possibly damage from alcohol abuse. Also, the only place that he can get "free" health care is at the Boyle-McCauley Health Centre on 96 st. It's location is convenient, but the 2-3 hour wait is not.

Then there is Anna who has always had a roof over her head, but barely. Anna is in her late 20's with two children (who have been apprehended by child welfare services). She was raised by a mentally ill single mother. She was hungry, beaten and abused sexually. At the age of 12 she began having sex with her boyfriend. She was pregnant at 13. She remembers being dangerously thin, bulimic and "bleeding a lot" when she miscarried. She was "scared shitless to tell anyone" and so did not seek medical help. Bouncing between dad, mom, foster homes and boyfriends, she took comfort in alcohol, cigarettes and food. Before she was 25 she was diagnosed with manic depressive illness, diabetes, anxiety-panic disorder, borderline personality disorder and morbid obesity. Being poor as a child had a profound impact on Anna, her fear of hunger caused her to gorge when she could. Now, when food is available she still acts out her old fears.

These two "case studies" if you will, are typical of far too many people living in our province. There is no excuse to have hungry children in our city. There are alternatives to fight boredom and build real self-esteem, not tear it down like drugs and alcohol will. Sensual expression can be encouraged in appropriate ways, through physical fitness, dance and drama. It truly does take a village to raise a child, but if it is done right, the village is enriched. ♦



IN MEMORIAM Margaret Cunningham

by Linda Dumont

Margaret (Maggie) Cunningham, whose story ran in the March issue of OurVoice (Street Mom Maggie) passed away April 1. She was admitted to the hospital the day after the story was written. A copy of her story and photo was displayed at her funeral. Maggie is remembered for her warmth and her sense of humour even in the face of the difficulties she faced in life.

CHILDREN AND POVERTY

When we talk about children and poverty, we need to realise that children are not isolated and alone in their poverty. Children are poor because their families are poor. We need to stop denying the fact that poverty and hunger exists for many children in our city, our province, and our country and need to start working on solutions.

On November 24, 1989, the Canadian House of Commons unanimously passed a resolution to "eliminate poverty among Canadian children by the year 2000." Here we are 10 years later and where do we stand? Between 1989 and 1996, child poverty has increased by 60 % (1998 Campaign 2000 report card on Child Poverty).

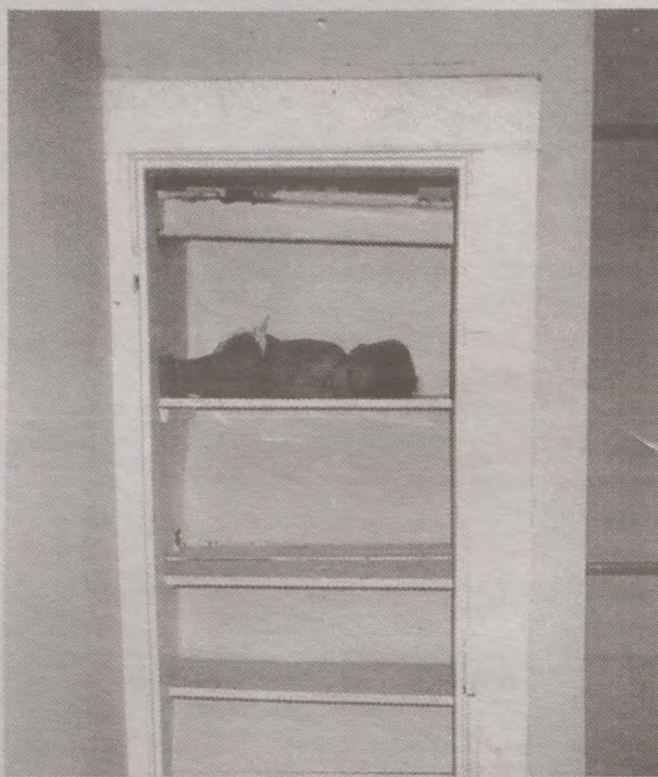
In April, there were two studies released in Calgary and Edmonton which indicated that there are over 93,000 children in the two cities who are hungry or at risk of hunger. One study by the Edmonton Social Planning Council showed that in Edmonton, one in three children or 48,172 are hungry or have a poor quality diet.

Many families are unable to provide an adequate and healthy diet for themselves. They have become dependent on food banks, breakfast programs and hot lunch programs. Some schools have been turning a blind eye to school-aged children who sneak their younger siblings into these programs in order to ensure that these children are at least getting one healthy meal per day.

These programs are band-aid solutions to the main problem which is lack of income to provide the basic needs. We need to look at the long term solutions or we will perpetuate the cycle of poverty by teaching our children to be dependent on charity. Don't get me wrong, these programs are meeting a very real need in our communities, but if we don't address the problem of poverty we will need to develop more and more band-aids.

We need to stop debating how many children are living in poverty. It doesn't matter if it is 50,000 or 5,000 the fact remains that many families can not meet their basic needs and end up having to depend on food programs to get by. Instead of debating which figures are correct, we need to look at long term solutions.

Children from poor families are disadvantaged from birth. There is no money for stimulating toys, books, playschool, recreational activities, music lessons and no time to engage in some of



Story and photo by Deanna Shorten

the free programs. Because of this we are losing a tremendous amount of human potential.

We need to stop debating how many children are living in poverty.

Alberta's welfare regulations force parents into training programs when their youngest child is a mere six months old. The family must then try to find quality and accessible childcare. That is truly a daunting task as many daycare centres do not accept children under the age of 18 months. We also know that poor families often rely on public transit as their primary method of transportation so they have to get a very early start to ensure they arrive at their programs on time. As well, most daycares are only open until 6:00pm and many jobs that are available require shift work. Then we need to look at the daily stresses on top of that, such as the inability to keep up with rent and utilities while operating in a deficit situation to begin with. It is very common for families to build up utility bills during the winter so when they head into spring they are faced with disconnect notices which must be paid out of the food budget.

Alberta's welfare regulations force parents into "We pay a heavy price for having children in

our society who grow up in poverty." (Prime Minister Jean Cretien, September 13, 1998) There is no question that allowing children to grow up in poverty presents a huge social cost. The question is what can we do about it? One solution is to streamline income security programs.

Currently, we have a range of services such as the Child Tax Benefit, Employment Insurance, and Provincial Social Services. They could be rolled together to form a Guaranteed Annual Income which would reduce administration costs allowing more money to be put into the hands of the families who need it the most. What we as a society need to decide is will we invest in our future by ensuring that our children have good quality of life, ensuring they reach their full potential or will we pay later by building more jails, increasing health care spending and more expensive crisis intervention programs.

Since the cuts to our "Welfare" program, the number of Child Welfare apprehensions has doubled and most of those cases are due to the lack of resources to provide the necessities of life. Children who are apprehended cost the taxpayer twice as much as families on welfare receive plus the stress on the children further diminishes their chances for the future. An example of the systematic unfairness is that a family of six would receive about \$1500 a month to provide for their family, if the four children in this family were placed into the Child Welfare system, the cost would be between \$2000 and \$3000 a month. Is this fiscally responsible? Is this benefiting our society as a whole?

Personally, I would prefer seeing all of our children growing up healthy, happy and with hope for a bright future, without barriers preventing them from reaching their full potential. The choice is ours, but we need to stop arguing about the problem and work on the solutions! ♦

Poverty in Action

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Prison Life's Kids

by Donna LaPrete

Gary is a 40 year old recovering addict. He has 16 years clean time under his belt. From the age of 12 he lived on and off inner-city streets in Edmonton and Vancouver.

Gary's father was a career criminal who did 18 years total time out of 25 years of sentences. Rollie started his life of crime when he was 15 by stealing a car. Gary remembers him being a "jack-of-all-trades" in the criminal business, ending his criminal life doing time for trafficking in heroin. The last five years of his life he managed to straighten out. He died at the age of 58 from liver disease, the result of a lifetime of drinking and drugs.

Gary's last memory of his father was a visit he made in 1991 to Vancouver when he was in the hospital. It was the first time he remembers ever hugging his father, a hug that was close and emotional, as Gary says, "for a change, not like hugging a tree". A year before his dad's death, on an impulse, he phoned his dad and said, "You know what, Dad, I don't remember ever telling you this, but I need to tell you I love you. I just didn't like what you did".

Gary says he didn't know his dad was in jail until he got older. He often saw his father in suits and thought he was a traveling salesman. Much of his life is a blank. His first memory was of his dad being drunk and violent, fighting with his mother. At the age of 3 he remembers running away after seeing somebody get raped. He remembers times trying to control his father's drunken rages during blackouts. Another time, treating him like a baby, sitting him in a chair and telling him to behave himself.

Gary also remembers when he was 15 being arrested for breaking and entering and one of the cops saying "You're going to be just like your dad". He remembers at the age of 11 in the airport having the RCMP tell him to "bend over and spread them" after having to drop his pants because his dad could have been using him to transport drugs.

"I think about my life and how it felt never to really feel that safe and loving warmth that is needed to grow up healthy. I was thrust into a world that wasn't safe. I don't blame my parents for my life. I only wish that we could have sat down and talked about the way it was and learn to express ourselves. I realise it is too late but what I can do is express myself now and how I was feeling all those years so someone else can maybe break the cycle of dysfunctional crap we all grow up with. I have to live with the scars of my own life; the acts of violence I had to live with, the ones I did and the ones done to me. Violence was the only way that I could create the illusion of feeling safe and powerful. The very first thing I remember in my life was an act of violence. I pray to my Creator that the last thing I remember is not an act of violence.

"Today I am trying to do something to make this world a better place to live. I have tears in my eyes when I wish my father was here so I could share all the nice things that are happening to me. Would he be proud of me? It sure would feel great if he could be here, but it wasn't meant to be. All I ever wanted from my dad was a thumbs up and the odd word of encouragement. It's really not a big thing to me that my father spent many years in jail. Someone can be in jail and still be a good parent by being hon-

est and open to emotions and feelings.

"It is a shame when I see many children falling into the ruts of their parents. Today I am 40 and really feel like I am finally seeing some light at the end of the tunnel. I have been clean for 16 years and other than 3 months and the odd days for fines I have been able in one way to break the cycle of 'in-and-out-of-jail' syndrome."

3 little girls

Karrilyn and Amber are the step-daughters of James Agecutay. The girls were 6 and 4 when James came into their lives and began his role as "Dad". They're 12-1/2 and 10-1/2 today. McKaylyn was born to James and Erin 2-1/2 years ago. In their own words, here are their thoughts and feelings:

"Hi! My name is Karrilyn. I'm the step-daughter of James Agecutay. In these few sentences I'm going to tell you how I feel about James being in jail.

"I don't think its right for him to continue to be kept in jail. He has taken most of their (CSC's) programs twice! It's hard with my mom sick most of the time and my Grandma at work while I'm trying to balance looking after my little sister and school work. It's not like I'm the one taking care of my little sister all the time. My mom looks after her a good

amount of the time. If James were here it would be a big help. My mom is just recovering from surgery and I have been looking after my little sister. I think it's been just about as hard as it is for me for my mom and my two younger sisters, maybe even harder.

Visiting James in jail is awful. Those big iron gates clang shut behind us when we go in. We're surrounded by high fences. They always frisk us and check through everything to make sure we aren't bringing in drugs. It makes me feel like I'm the criminal. The visiting room is always full of people but the guards watch you all the time and listen to everything you say. It's embarrassing! But there's nothing to do and we can't take anything in to occupy ourselves.

In summer it's better because we can at least sit outside but it's a small area and there still isn't anything to do. I don't like the trailer visits (72-hr. private family visits) because we're cooped up all that time with only a tiny little yard. There isn't much to do but watch TV and play a few games.

"Hi! My name is Amber. I really don't like my dad being in jail. He has missed out on my birthday, Christmas, Easter, Father's Day and all special events for as long as I've known him which is a long time. I have missed him. I barely get to see him.

"I love my dad very much. I wish he will get out of jail very very soon.. I want my family to be complete. I go and visit him on trailer visits (PFV's - private family visits) and day visits but that isn't very often. I wonder how he feels in jail. I wonder what kind of room he lives in.

I asked McKaylyn, the 2-1/2 year old where daddy was. While she was busily showing me how she did her exercises, she said, "At work".

These three little girls are finding life difficult. Because their mother is in a single-mom situation, they have added responsibilities. They tell me they wish James was home with them because things are easier then and Mom is happier. They are fortunate to have a very loving Grandmother who plays a big part in their lives. ♦



Amber, Karrilyn, and McKaylyn



Michael Moore

TV's comic thorn in the side of
America's elite: Part 2

Interview and story by Michael Walters

In April's Fifth anniversary issue of **Our Voice**, documentary film maker Michael Moore spoke with **Our Voice**. This is the conclusion of the discussion.

OV: Globalisation. America is leading the way and forcing countries like Canada to lower its standard so to cater again to the rich. In simple terms, what does it mean to you and what should it mean to us.

MM: The whole thing with globalisation is that the rich no longer consider themselves American or Canadian, they are part of what is the world economy. They could give a rats ass about the country they live in or the neighbour they live next door to. But it's very important to have the rest of us thinking in terms of nationalism, you know, 'I'm an American and that Mexican is taking my job.' So they get all of us working people focusing our anger and blame on each other instead of on the right people. American and Canadian rich people all see globalisation the same way. If you remember the first trade agreement before NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) (before NAFTA was the Free Trade Agreement), it was all a big scam by

the U.S. to take advantage of low wage workers in Canada or to have work shipped to low wage workers here. Also there are more Canadian immigrants in the US either legal or illegal than from any other country. Many people are coming here to find there fortunes and not necessarily bringing it back to Canada.

OV: There's been a lot of concern expressed in our media, from the anti-tax right lately about so many of our largest brains leaving Canada to find their fortunes in the US. Can you comment?

MM: Well they're half right and that is why they're so successful in their appeal and this is what is dangerous about the nuttier rightwing groups like our Ross Perot or your Reform Party. They succeed because they appeal to a basic populism and they often have a healthy disrespect for authority and rich people, but they take that and twist it and try to build their movements by creating fear among people, you know like- that American or Mexican is taking my job or our greatest minds are fleeing the country, close the borders- that's not really the problem. The problem is getting back to what I've always called the Canadian ethic and you have to understand that when you live in the US and you look to Canada you see a lot of things you wish our country would aspire to, both in terms of how you are as individuals and how over the years you have legislated certain beliefs you have about how you should treat each other. It's now sad to watch you remove those safeguards.

Michael Moore's new series, airing on Bravo, **The Awful Truth** debuts in Canada on Sunday May 16.

The show, a lot like **TV Nation**, Moore's first tv series, is a bold adventure into challenging the laws and movements of corporate America. One can expect unlimited hilarity and enlightenment from the **Awful Truth** and Moore continues to be in the face of the fat cat, whether he's chal-

lenging Secretary of Defence William Cohen to an arm wrestle or trying to sneak an American worker into Mexico to get his old job back.

Premiere segments scheduled for May combine topical issues with Moore's own keen observations, including -A cheaper way to conduct a witch hunt. Moore takes a group of puritans down to D.C. to show Ken Starr and the congress how next time to conduct a proper and affordable witch hunt. Moore poses the hush hush 'Are you a fornicator?' question to the many Republicans he encounters along his way.

-HMO Funeral. Moore plans a funeral for the father of a four year old girl and invites the CEO of HMO Humana. The man will soon die because HMO has a policy of selling people two health insurance policies and honouring the one that does not apply to the individual. In this case the father needs a pancreas transplant. The CEO does not come to the funeral so Moore brings the funeral to him.

-Air drop TVs on Afghanistan. The new religious government in Afghanistan has given everyone thirty days to turn in their televisions...or else! Moore decided to air drop TV sets on the country so they don't miss his show.

Make sure to tune in on May 16.

"C'mon Ralph, I'll take you on Buddy!"

Since our Premier will never go to Michael Moore, perhaps we can bring him to Alberta.

In his interview with **Our Voice**, Michael Moore said he'd love to come to Edmonton. But being as busy as he must be, it might take a bit of convincing. If you would like to see **Our Voice** bring Michael Moore to Edmonton, you can help us out by writing a letter to his attention, telling him who you are and why you want to see him in Edmonton. Then email, fax or drop off these letters to us and we'll make sure he reads them all and we'll do our best to bring him to our city. ♦

The candy man....poor but princely

by Cec Garfin

James had early ambitions of becoming a policeman but because of health reasons it didn't work out. He has panhandled downtown for 6 years and more recently only stays on Whyte Avenue, where he finds the people more friendly and generous.

James really loves his mother and on occasion will buy her flowers; more recently he gave her \$200 to purchase some medical stockings. James panhandles out of need. He has nothing else to do with his days and needs the money.

He is known as the Candy Man or the Pepsi Kid because of his liking for both. He often buys a number of chocolate bars and gives them to vendors and buskers on Whyte Ave. He also gives chocolatebars to his friends at

P.I.N. House (People in Need). One unpleasant occurrence panhandling downtown was when a number of people punched and kicked him and stole his money, his jacket and shoes.

The other side of the coin, a nice story occurred late last year. He asked a lady for 50 cents for a cup of coffee. She gave him a \$50 bill instead and James didn't realise what he had until he got home that day. James is 38 years old and was born in Edmonton. His adopted parents live here and he has two sisters. **Our Voice** vendors on Whyte Avenue are encouraging James to sell **Our Voice** to make his extra money. We will certainly welcome him aboard. ♦



Throw away kids Canada's second class citizens

Rodney Graham in Winnipeg

They are the last to be hired and the first to be laid off. They have the hardest time finding housing - landlords prefer tenants with deep pockets and plenty of references. If they are too young they cannot even obtain shelter legally or obtain other support services unless charged with a crime. They are "throw away kids", Canada's second class citizens.

Youth Not At Fault

According to the Toronto task force on homelessness paper, "Taking Responsibility for Homelessness", more than 70% of young people who leave home prematurely do so because of physical and/or sexual abuse. Not because of the fault of the child.

Amber and Tina

Amber Sekora, 20 yrs, and Tina Shaver, 18 yrs, frequented the Siloam Mission in order to survive. Tina, who's been on the street for two years, gets \$271 a month for shelter and about \$80 or \$90 every two weeks for food.

"I usually end up spending my rent on food and other things and then cannot afford my rent, that's why I end up living with friends or sleeping in restaurants."

"I come from parents who beat kids," she said, "I'm worried about my sister. She's only fourteen and still at home."

Tina has Fetal Alcohol Syndrome...

Amber was also beaten regularly and as well has Fetal Alcohol Syndrome

"My family doesn't want anything to do with me," she says, "they don't like my boyfriend. My real dad is in Edmonton. I'm studying the Bible, living day to day. I used to do drugs, it was the thing to do, it dulls the feelings of hopelessness...God has helped me out."

"There's not enough help," she said, "Some of these people need treatment." She glanced around the crowded room where about two hundred

hungry street people ate.

Siloam Mission has recently been torn down as part of the city's beautification program...A cruel testament to Ambers words.. 'not enough help..'

Youth Misunderstood

In the face of rising youth homelessness across Canada the government is beefing up it's young offenders act.

"We don't have to go to extremes of penalties to solve our problems," said Glen Cochrane, Winnipeg's street gang coordinator. "They are trying to legislate away their social troubles and it's not going to work."

Flip, Maria, and Pixie sing in Winnipeg.



Cochrane said youth must be given a future more appealing than gang life before they have the strength to resist the lure of the street. He says the portrayal of youth out of control has been blown out of proportion by the media.

The 1998 Canadian Global Almanac gives a picture much different than the one portrayed by Canadian media across our nation: 90 percent of homicides committed in Canada were carried out by adults - only 10 percent by youth. 84 percent of assault was perpetrated by adults, 15 percent by youth. 71 percent of theft under \$5,000 was by adults--29 percent by youth. And, interestingly, theft over \$5,000 was even higher- 80 percent by adults...20 percent by youth.

Youth are also far more likely to be victims of

assault from an adult than an adult is likely to be assaulted by a youth.

Flip, Maria, and Pixie

Flip is 16 years old and was tossed out by his parents. He gets by asking for money on the street (hard to get away with in Winnipeg), and "couch surfing" at friends who have apartments...

Maria, 18 yrs, is not really homeless but is a student at U.W. and subsidises her tuition expenses by busking. Maria pointed out that students are often a step away from the street. Statistics show that tuitions for university have increased by 150% since 1993. The average student debt has grown from about \$8,000 in 1991 to nearly \$25,000 in 1998.

Pixie, 15 yrs, was verbally abused at home by virtually every member of the family.

"I was the scapegoat", she said. "I was called the slut", "stupid", "fat".. lots of things."

"It was all hush hush, the physical abuse started around age 7. Then one morning at age thirteen mom woke me up and said, 'You're not welcome in this home! Get out!'

"Pixie" has been in five foster homes since age thirteen. "Most of the foster homes I was in, I was physically abused. Most of these foster homes are only in it for the money. I know one guy who has ten kids... he makes a lot of money. I would run away from homes mainly because of physical

abuse and sometimes because of verbal abuse...I didn't like it, it reminded me of home. Most kids will never talk about abuse of any kind because they're afraid to tell - because they usually are not believed - it's supposedly always the kids fault..."

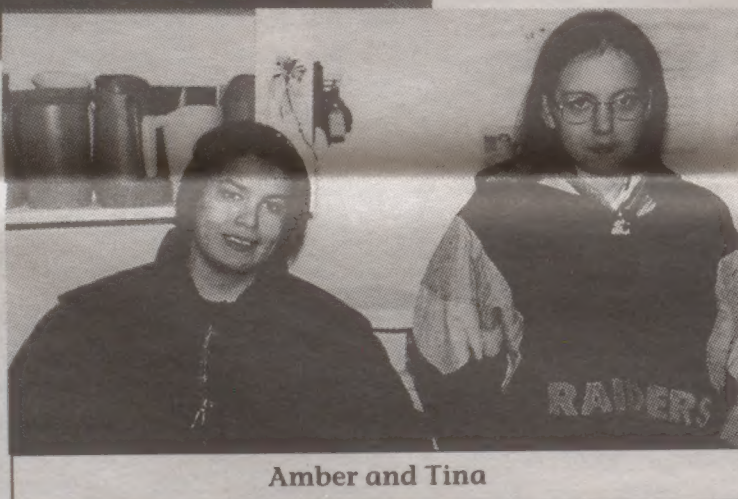
Pixie's parents are both professionals, now divorced, and her father lives in Ontario. Her mother often gives her money. But "Pixie" calls it a "bribe". Her mother has never invited her back home.

"I always bring a few people with me when I meet her in public to collect the "bribe", she said, "it's because I'm afraid of her."

Maria looked a bit startled by her remark.

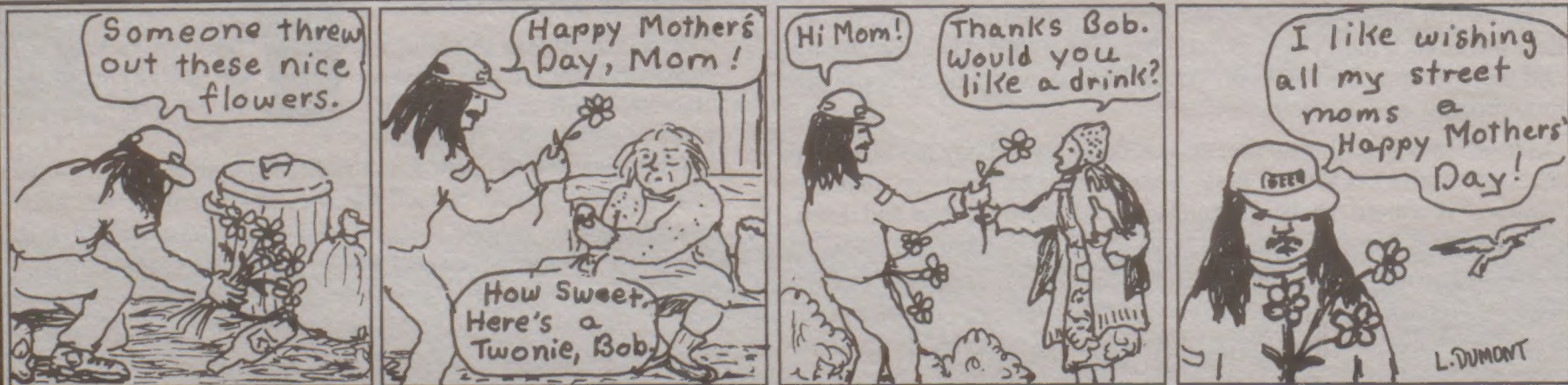
"You mean you're afraid she'll kill you?" she said.

"No,"...she said, "it's because she's hurt me so much...I just don't want to be alone with her." ♦



Amber and Tina

SOUPLINE BOB
by Linda Dumont



A daily struggle... reflecting on mother's day

by Delmy Garcia

For me it is important to look at and understand things from the perspective of women's specific problems, which are always related to life, survival, health and children.

Women all over the world have to endure pain, suffering and struggle for their own rights. Many women have lost their children, their husbands have disappeared, they have been raped, they are working the streets, they are single parents, they are hungry, unable to find employment and are living in shanty homes, suffering from malnutrition.

These realities are not far from what I see here at the Bissell Centre. I see native, caucasian or those from other minority cultures, prostituted and raped by life with their tired faces, physically marked by drug or alcohol abuse. They are pregnant with children, loosing teeth and hair. They have vision problems and are unable to afford glasses. They are suffering from eating disorders. They are hungry, many with a body showing the worst years of life. Some are on Social Assistance and struggling everyday to feed their kids.

We belong to the so called First World, but yet I hear moms on a daily basis telling me how they are feeding their infants with coffee, evaporated milk without sugar, Homo milk at birth, water, a piece of pizza at three months old, pudding, or yogurt. That is all they have in the house to eat. These children at early months are already showing signs of malnutrition. They are not being bathed for days, and have lots of allergies and respiratory problems. They have teeth already with cavities. They have very little positive stimulation. These are our children from the First World.

As a family worker and an immigrant myself, the first thing that comes into my mind is the rich suffer from full stomachs and the poor suffer from empty stomachs. Nowadays it is not enough to feel sorry for the poor because that sorrow doesn't go too far.

To be in solidarity with the poor we don't have to give up everything or stop being who we are. It's the effort to open ourselves up, and try to understand their culture and lifestyle. To discover the human meaning of wealth is to discover a happiness, a well-being, a meaning for that which is the fruit



Happy mother Heather with happy baby

of human hands, that every person has a right to.

During the month of May, which is the month of Mother's Day, I want you to reflect on these women who are not only mothers, but they are warriors. Women for whom their stove is no longer their limit; because on a daily basis they are struggling to survive and be there for their children. For these women, it will be hard to celebrate Mother's Day if they don't have baby formula or food on the table to feed their infants or their older children.

Just remember that we do have a place for our gifts and our work at the service of changing society. We have to see our good to serve the grassroots struggle. ♦

Where are they now

In the March issue of **Our Voice**, Tom Murray talked to Gerald Boychuck, a Political Science Phd, about a recent report done by the Alberta Government and the Canada West Foundation looking into the results of heavy cuts to Alberta's Social Service supports back in 1993 and 1994. Boychuck's report was critical of the Canada West Foundation report, saying that their methodology was deeply flawed and that actually they give no real, honest indication in determining where people who were cut off or restricted from social supports are now.

Here are some of the real human stories as we try to find out "WHERE ARE THEY NOW!"

My sister's story

by Betty Nordin

Here in Canada we have so many people in need of help and they can't get it. One example of this is my sister. She has Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (F.A.S.) and is very easily intimidated by people with authority. She was on welfare because of her situation. Then she came into a small inheritance, an amount considered to be enough for about six months of modest living. When the money ran out, she still had Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, was still unemployable and couldn't get back on welfare. She didn't know how to

manage her money and a lot of people took advantage of her. She was broke and had nowhere to turn.

She continued to reapply for assistance, but was refused numerous times. She appealed repeatedly, but again to no avail. They continued to tell her that she had her inheritance. I don't know how long they thought it could last. My sister gave them her bank statements showing she had no money, but social services in Calgary continued to refuse her. When she wrote the department of Social Services a letter stating she had absolutely no money, they then requested bills and receipts for every transaction she had made.

Most of her inheritance went to rent and to a very opportunistic landlady, who gave her no receipts. When my sister went broke, the landlady started taking her things, like her t.v. and furniture and selling them. She had no one at the time to give her direction. When there was no more for the landlady to take, she kicked my sister out on the street.

Social Services and AISH were still refusing to help her. The result was that my sister was going to give up and go and live on the street again. It was the only place she thought she had to go, but I was able to get her to come up here to stay with me for a while. The good news is, that after a week here in Edmonton, she was able to get some help. She was given \$160 by Social Services as a start and hopefully get some help for F.A.S.

Her self-esteem is up a bit now. She said, "I finally feel like a human being again." Her esteem was so low that she thought the only place she belonged was 'sleeping in a dumpster'. Why should a person's self-esteem be dragged down so low? What kind of support system is that? So where is my sister now? On her own, she'd be a \$160 away from the street. ♦



Poems

Poetry by Tom Hind

RATIONS

my life is on quarter ounce rations
a swig of beer here, a puff there,
very little daily meat as I meet
more vegetarians than carnivores
under the black umbrella
perched on top of which two crows
squawking
utter death threats;

the Time is Coming, yes, Time loams
Apocalyptically black with feathers
that tickle as they diligently kill
ALL
Very good and Very bad people.

A WISH

Can time's clock ticking away mortals
Be stopped at some future date
As is the human it minutes away
To meet a stop watch fate?

Oh time! What purpose, what advance
Makes you take your certain stance
With life, which swings in pendulum
Unerringness to death?

Are von disdainful of life
To make it so unsure
For those who entertain its pleasure?

Why do you measure life's hour.
Making it more than something to treasure?

Oh time, that I were you,
What then could I not do!

LAST STAMP

If ever I could not post myself
to some glimmering destination,
some emboldened actions glazing life's run
from life to lifetime until candle's done
and all is extinguished except happy memories ...

What if I couldn't post myself as I pleased
because interventional fate tortured me, seized
my soul and threw it against mountain walls
until its rosen colour slowly began its falls

into one of Dante's fiery chasms
where devils worship lowly, life-hungering fashions
giving all to Baal, declared king of the dead,
who knows no glory unless it have blood-splattered head.

Now, if I can't post my mind to climb slippery-peaked
mountains
goated
grizzled
bob-catted
running raging burbling creeks and fountains ...

If I can't post my imagination to someone
then, please, Sir, diligently, softly tell me ...

What do I do with the last stamp?
Eh? if I can't post myself to some country's ramp?

Then, Sir, what good is the last stamp?



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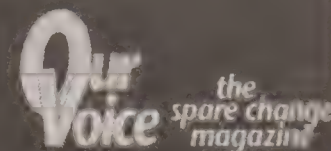


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Fighting the Odds

NEW
FICTION
PART FOUR

(In last month's installment, Hope faces her loss of love for Kenny, her husband. She finds it unbearable to be near him and is grateful when he leaves. She's hurt, however, that her children miss him and blame her that he's gone.)

BY ALLISON KYDD

After about six months, it seemed that Hope's little family had settled into a routine. To her relief, Kenny was finally picking up the children at the scheduled time on his weekends—for the first few months he'd seemed to stop by whenever he felt like it.

Yet Hope still sensed he was waiting for her to fail. Waiting for her to beg him to come home. It didn't seem to matter that he'd found another woman who needed a man. Hope knew about her because the children always came home full of stories about Veronica and her house. But Kenny still acted as if he owned Hope as well, so she felt sick just seeing his car at the curb.

Once she tried to avoid him by having a headache and going to bed. She hoped he'd just pick up the children and leave. To her horror, she heard his footsteps on the stairs, and for a weak moment she pictured him coming into the bedroom and taking her in his arms. It was so tempting, the dream of having someone to care for her again.

Just in time, she remembered it wasn't just love-making that had happened between them. She jumped out of bed, grabbed her robe and put it on, ripping a sleeve half out of its socket as she did so, and got to the doorway first. As she opened the door, pulling it closed behind her, she met him face to face.

"Are you hiding someone then?" he asked. She ignored him, stepped out of reach and headed down the stairs, praying that he'd follow her. The children were waiting by the door. All in their little jackets with their bags over their shoulders. She was hugging them lavishly when Kenny came back down.

"Hurry up, Da, we're ready to go!" said four-year-old Shelagh, putting her hands on her hips just as if she was going to dance for them, just the way her father'd taught her. Kenny grinned at her and whirled his youngest daughter into his arms. Shelagh was his darling. She was still so young

and fearless. Kenny never seemed to enjoy his children as much when they got older.

"Bye, Mum," muttered the other two, and the whole lot of them trooped out the door without another word. Hope watched through the sun-room window until Kenny's car pulled away. Then she sat down on the nearest chair. She wrapped her arms around herself, feeling the bare skin where she'd torn her robe, and let the tears roll down her cheeks.

Next time she'd know better than to try to avoid seeing Kenny, though she hated the way he was still controlling her. Neither could she risk coming home late from work on those days. She didn't want to miss saying goodbye to the children, and he'd say she was neglecting them. Or maybe he'd even come and make a scene at the bookstore. No sense risking it. All she could do was avoid getting into any kind of serious conversation and never give him any reason to go upstairs in what was now her house.

As time went on, Shelagh stopped asking for her Da in between the weekends they saw him. And Gareth stopped coming home from school mad every day; now it was only every second day. Even Margie seemed to be more relaxed. She actually asked a friend to visit after school, something she'd never done before.

Hope, who always rushed to be there at least half an hour before the children came home, went to welcome them as usual when she heard Gareth's key at the back door.

"Hi, Mum," he said and whistled on his way upstairs. Then there was Margie herding Shelagh inside with far more kindness than she usually showed her sister and, finally, this strange little girl in tow.

"Hello, Moth-er," said Margie self-consciously, but giving her mother an extravagant hug around the waist, which revealed her excitement. "We're going to play 'Little House on the Prairie', and Shelagh's going to be the baby."

"Goo, goo," said Shelagh, to prove it, imitating Margie's hug in a way that made Hope's heart lurch with pleasure. Her baby then took the friend by the hand and led her upstairs; Margie started after them.

Hope could tell her oldest daughter was having difficulty hiding her pride and delight in having a friend come over. For Hope, however, the extra child was a problem.

"Margie, come here," she called.

"What?" said Margie twitching her shoulders and looking longingly up the stairs. Hope beckoned again and, when Margie finally came to her, whispered so they wouldn't be overheard.

"Is your friend staying for supper?"

"I don't know. Maybe."

"Well, sweetheart, I think maybe you shouldn't invite her. You see, I only have enough hot dogs for us."

Margie's face drooped instantly, and her voice became a whine, "Oh, why do we have to be so poor all the time? Why can't we be like other people?" Hope caught her by the shoulders, a bit more roughly than she'd planned. "Listen," she said, "I don't need that kind of talk from you. Margie, look at me!" She gave her a shake.

Margie twisted within her grasp. "You're hurting me," she whimpered--extravagantly, Hope felt. "Why do you have to be so mean?" Hope released her, instantly ashamed. "Next time, just please ask me first," she said, escaping to the kitchen to save face. She could give Margie's little friend her own supper, she supposed, better than than spoil her daughter's day anymore than she already had.

Why had she been so hard on Margie? Was it her period coming? Was she just that lonely, jealous of her own children for having friends when she had nobody?

A few minutes later the telephone rang. The speaker identified herself as a Mrs. Allen. She was from social services, she said.

"Yes," said Hope, for lack of anything better to say. Her throat felt suddenly dry, as if she knew this would be another crisis.

"We've had a complaint about you," said the invisible Mrs. Allen.

to be continued.

JOHN'S STYLE FILE

Thomas Hoon

*John Zapantis
Our Voice vendor, writer and
photographer meets the most
interesting people.*



Thomas Hoon, a second Dan Black belt volunteer instructor, loves the challenge of helping young students develop the fundamentals of self-defense.

Thomas hopes to one day establish his own Karate studio. This skilled and experienced instructor would love to one day provide Karate teaching to children living in the inner city.

"I remember back as a kid, I totally loved going to Karate and getting such a positive attitude. That's why I want to give back to the kids. I get high on seeing their smiling faces. I want to teach kids to do it for fun, because there are too many clubs out there that are in it for the money," Thomas says.

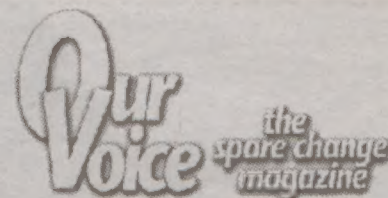
Sensei Fred Bogosoff has been instrumental in assisting Thomas toward obtaining his Blackbelt at the age of 12. The fourth Dan Black certified martial arts instructor, in the art of Sakuu-Kai, has had emotional and social impact on Thomas and has helped inspire him to excel in the ranks of professional competition.

Developing the proper skills in

Karate has enhanced Hoon's self-confidence. "Back in Grades 1, 2 and 3, prior to martial arts, I was the quietest kid in the class. People wouldn't even know I was in the class. I wouldn't put up my hand for anything. I was the shiest guy out there. Now I'm probably one of the most out going in my school. It's all self-confidence. You know you've disciplined yourself and that you're good at something.

"If your child is between the age of 7 and 14 and if they'd be interested in Karate classes, please contact Pauline Wong at 457-5990 or else call 914-6801. Classes go from 5 - 6:30 p.m every Monday at Kildare Elementary School at 7525-144 Avenue in Edmonton. ♦

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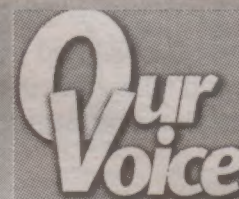
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Next month in



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Changing the name of panhandling.

Here comes the HAPPY PAGE.

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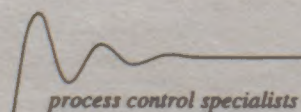
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IN EDMONTON

Michelle Semple

BY JOHN ZAPANTIS

Michelle, now a veteran **Our Voice** vendor, is partially blind and has been disabled since birth.

The outgoing and friendly young woman is admirably acknowledged for her courage and diplomacy when meeting customers who stop and chat while buying **Our Voice**.

Michelle began selling **Our Voice** in May of 1996.

Vending **Our Voice** supplements Michelle's monthly income.

"It helps me buy a lot of things I need like groceries and clothing," she says.

You may find Michelle selling **Our Voice** in Edmonton on 102 avenue and 100 street, 102 street-Jasper ave and by the exit of the 102A avenue Churchill LRT pedway.

Michelle would like to express these sweet words of encouragement for loyal customers who continually show their support for her and other vendors.

"I hope you keep buying lots of magazines and enjoy reading **Our Voice**."



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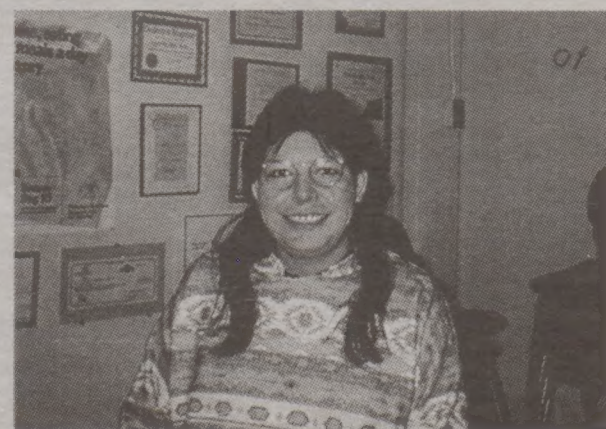
CITIZEN OF THE MONTH

Connie Gamble

by Cec Garfin

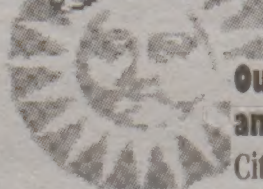
Connie Gamble grew up in Athabasca and came to Edmonton seeking work about 10 years ago.

To keep busy she volunteered at the SPCA, where she looked after the dogs and kennels for 6 months. She then was offered a full time paid position doing the same thing, which she held for 15 months. Four months ago she started volunteer work at the main food bank sorting fruit and vegetables. She is a hard worker and enjoys the atmosphere there. She works well on her



own or with others. Connie is looking forward to summer; she likes playing softball. Congratulations Connie, you're a deserving winner.

Café Mosaics



**Our Voice Magazine
and Café Mosaics'**
Citizen of the Month

EVERY MONTH in **Our Voice**, we will be featuring someone who has gone the extra mile in their lives or in their careers to make a difference in the lives of those who are less fortunate.

The Citizen of the Month will receive a dinner for two courtesy of the Garneau Café Mosaics on Whyte Avenue.



The Art of Allen Gaterreaux



Hi my name is Allen Gaterreaux. I was a treaty First Nation of Black Lake, Saskatchewan. I was born in 1970 and for a few years grew up with my beautiful mother and close sister.

I went to school for the deaf in Saskatoon in 1974. I learned how to draw when I was five and a half years old in my first kindergarden class.

As a child I recall time spent with my great Grandparents. They taught me how to winter trap and winter hunt and all other parts of my tradition and culture.

I graduated from the School for the Deaf in 1991 and moved to Edmonton where I heard of the Dreamspeakers festival. I worked it and sold my artwork. In 1997 my art won the Dreamspeaker's Logo contest.

I plan to attend Grant MacEwan Community College in the fall to take Native Communications and Graphic Design.